

The House of Representatives passed H.R. 928, the Improving Government Accountability Act, by a vote of 404-11. The bill enhances independence and accountability of Inspectors General in federal agencies.

Chairman Towns summarized the bill on the House floor:

“H.R. 928, the Improving Government Accountability Act, focuses on the important role of the Inspectors General in providing independent oversight within federal agencies. By investigating and reporting waste, fraud and abuse to both agency leaders and to the Congress, Inspectors General play a critical role in maintaining checks and balances in the federal government.

When Congress created the Inspectors General nearly 30 years ago, the idea was that having independent officials inside the federal agencies would help detect and prevent wasteful spending and mismanagement. This concept has been a tremendous success.

Investigations by I.G.s have resulted in the recovery of billions of dollars from companies and individuals who defrauded the federal government. These investigations have led to thousands of criminal prosecutions, contractor debarments, and employee suspensions and dismissals. In sum, the work of I.G.s to expose criminal and abusive action in government has gone a long way to create the cleaner and more efficient government the taxpaying public expects and deserves.

Of course, even the best systems need some improvement from time to time, and that is the reason for this bill. To effectively carry out their mission, Inspectors General must be independent and objective, which requires that they be insulated from improper management and political pressure. To preserve the credibility of the office, Inspectors General must also perform their duties with integrity and apply the same standards of conduct and accountability to themselves as they apply to the agencies that they audit and investigate.

In recent years, there have been several episodes which raise questions about the independence and accountability of I.G.s. These episodes have been well documented in

hearings of the Oversight Committee, as well as other standing Committees of the House. In some instances, I.G.s who were seen as too aggressive in pursuing waste at their agencies had their budgets cut, or were threatened with dismissal. In other cases, I.G.s who abused their authority remained in office, in part because there were no statutory standards or procedures for removal. This bill is designed to address both of these problems.

H.R. 928 creates fixed terms of office for Inspectors General and specific reasons for their removal. It allows I.G.s to submit their budget requests directly to Congress. The bill establishes an Inspectors General Council, and sets procedures for investigating potential IG misconduct. And the bill increases the rank and pay of I.G.s.

This is a strong bill, and a necessary one. Passing this bill will send a message that Congress values the work of the Inspectors General, and the oversight that they provide.”

Links:

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